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UNCLAS COLOMBO 001514

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DEPARTMENT FOR DRL AND SA/INS  
DEPARTMENT PLEASE ALSO PASS USAID - ANE/SA FOR ERIC PICARD

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: PHUM EAID PGOV CE  
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: REQUEST FOR ELECTION SUPPORT

REF: A. COLOMBO 1503

1B. COLOMBO 1446

11. This is an action request. Please see Para 4.

12. SUMMARY: Post requests funding in the amount of USD 400,000 to support local NGO efforts to monitor and observe upcoming presidential and/or general elections. Because of initial uncertainty surrounding the length of incumbent President Chandrika Kumaratunga's second term--and thus the date for presidential elections--local election monitoring organizations may lack sufficient funds to cover these polls, which the Supreme Court has just decided must take place by November 22 (Ref A). In addition, the prospect of a snap general election (either right before or right after the presidential poll) is looming large, and regularly scheduled local elections are planned for February 2006. While recent innovations have modestly improved prospects for a free and fair election, Sri Lanka's history of election violence, voter intimidation and ballot tampering makes monitoring by local organizations with a proven track record essential to continuing this hopeful trend. END SUMMARY.

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NO HANGING CHADS, YET  
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13. The Supreme Court decision on August 26 that presidential elections must be held by November 22 (Ref A) ended a year of uncertainty about the polling date but left just about everyone--from the politicians themselves to the government to civil society--scrambling to get organized on short notice. Complicating this scenario is the all-too likely possibility that the President may dissolve Parliament--either right before or right after the elections--thereby necessitating snap general elections as well. Finally, regularly scheduled local elections in February 2006 make a grand total of three likely island-wide elections within four months. The 2004 general elections saw some decline in polls-related violence, thanks in part, according to the Election Commissioner, to such improvements as the creation of an independent Police Commission to shield police from politically motivated retribution. Nonetheless, conditions surrounding the upcoming election, a fiercely contested, high-stakes race that observers already are predicting may be too close to call, could foster the violence, mayhem, intimidation and vote-tampering all too characteristic of past elections.

14. In the past, the Center for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV) and the People's Action for Free and Fair Elections (PAFFREL), indigenous election monitoring organizations with a reputation for integrity, have proved very useful in promoting free and fair elections in Sri Lanka. The USAID Mission in Sri Lanka, which funded both organizations through the National Democratic Institute (NDI) during the 2004 parliamentary elections, has no such funds available this year. Both CMEV and PAFFREL have provided detailed budgets for election monitoring, which include plans to train and support thousands of domestic monitors, in addition to fielding 50 international observers each for the upcoming presidential polls. To date, PAFFREL has raised USD 50,000 from international donors and is confident it can raise an additional USD 100,000 from others. Because of the short lead time before presidential elections, however, both organizations may face difficulty in raising sufficient funding by November.

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ACTION REQUEST  
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15. Embassy requests Department fund election monitoring efforts to be conducted by CMEV and PAFFREL in the total amount of USD 400,000 for the following key components:

--Printed material such as caps, arm bands, identification badges, monitoring forms - USD 64,070;  
--Training for poll monitors - USD 104,800;  
--Travel costs and training for 24 international observers -

USD 46,000;  
--Election day monitoring costs for 200 temporary district  
and divisional offices and operating costs for 250 mobile  
monitoring units - USD 185,130  
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